

Reflections

by the
Most Reverend Thomas J. Murphy



The Parish Community

The last few months have been an exciting time for myself as I traveled to various parts of our Diocese to celebrate Mass on the weekend and to share the gift of the Spirit with young people and adults through the Sacrament of Confirmation. I found myself for the first time in some of the Mission parishes of our Diocese and this has prompted some reflections on the importance and significance of our parishes and missions in Eastern Montana.

The parish is at the heart of our identity as a Church. It is the parish community which brings people together to celebrate their faith and to share the significant moments of their lives with others whether through baptism, First communion, marriage, Confirmation, and the celebration of the funeral liturgy. Our worship celebrates who we are not only on a weekend, but gives us the nourishment and strength to live out our identity as Catholics throughout the week.

However, a parish community in the Roman Catholic Church is not an isolated independent unit. A parish community must relate to the Diocese of which it is a part and both parish and diocese must relate to the universal Church. This becomes evident in the care and concern we must have not only for our own local parish or mission, but the way in which we share our resources through the Diocese - spiritual and financial - with one another. To do otherwise is to contradict the identity which is ours as Roman Catholics.

One of the developments in the Roman Catholic Church that has affected our parish communities has been the renewal in liturgy. For some, this renewal has been difficult; for others, it has been a source of renewed faith and appreciation for the worship of the Church. Hopefully, the liturgy will always be, as our Holy Father has recently stated, a source of unity and never a reason for division.

Each of the phases in the renewal of the liturgy whether in the celebration of sacraments or in the recommendations for art and architecture has a solid theological and liturgical basis. We are asked to be open to an understanding of this renewal which hopefully will effect our lives as Catholics in the world today. As Bishop, along with the religious women, priests and brothers of the Diocese, we have the obligation to be faithful to the universal Church in fulfilling our responsibilities to the People of God of our Diocese not on our terms, but on the terms of a universal Church. We do this through explanation, instruction, witness, and fidelity to the Church.

But all this becomes alive in the local parish experience. I pray constantly that our parishes may be open to the work of the Spirit around us by their fidelity to the renewal in the Church today. We have celebrated a call to greatness this past year during our Jubilee. The call to greatness is still there. It is up to each of us, and especially our parishes, to respond!